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## Only rights? / Conversation with Miklós Maróth

“Miklós Maróth’s career can barely be introduced in the transcript of a two-hour conversation. No, that’s not possible. Still, the attempt comes to life and a portrait; a face is born out of it that may be important for many. It certainly is for me, and I dare believe that it is lasting. There are people who spend their whole life explaining why *it* cannot be successful... Something. Anything. I don’t believe that the professor belongs to this group and neither do I. And it’s a well-suited beginning. What’s about to follow enriches with unexpected experiences and while I’ve known before that in a university atmosphere arrogance is inversely proportional to the achieved results, I didn’t expect such a sense of humor, and particularly, such self-irony. So, I bravely send the following message to the youth: age is not only worthy of respect when it is bottled, and outstanding results are never born out of work saved.”

Miklós Maróth, *Széchenyi Prize winner classical scholar, orientalist, university professor, member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences*

*Professor, the public may not know about you that you are the founding dean of Pázmány Péter Catholic University. You started organizing the faculty of humanities in 1991 and you were the dean until 1999. How do you assess the fate of the university since the beginning to today?*

At the time, the goal was to escort the university out of the higher education system the operation of which had carried many problems based on my experiences. For example,

certain professions were ruled entirely by interest alliances and they handed out all the available positions. On the other hand, I wanted to have Pázmány University restored by bringing back the faculty of theology that was expelled in the past; actually, the Loránd Eötvös name could have remained as well. Many said no to this since there had already been a department of philosophy at the faculty of humanities at ELTE. So, a new university had to be created that teaches philosophy, sociology, and other social sciences in a different spirit. Naturally, there are many difficulties to face when establishing a new university, for example, going in quest of finding the teaching staff; who are those who don't teach at other universities, but are still good enough professionally?

*Was it a prerequisite that they couldn't teach at other schools?*

No, we had a few such teachers, but it would have been quite a challenge to win over a professor from Debrecen to teach in Piliscsaba. Many people from ELTE taught at our school, but still, the most ideal is if we are able to establish our own teaching staff. My thinking was that those who had already retired, but are in good strength, could teach and the young ones, who are taught by the older generation, if talented enough, can join our staff later as our own teachers. During the organization of Pázmány I tried to create larger classrooms to give space to the lectures but it was very difficult. Even though we announced the lectures, fewer people sat in than they did in seminars. However, a new department cannot be built up of seminars only. The education structure that came about as a pressure of necessity at ELTE also had a major influence on the activities of Pázmány. The patterns and habits set in people's minds made it very difficult to establish an independent image of the faculty.

*What is your opinion about the Bologna system of education?*

At the time when I was still teaching I became a member of the National Bologna Committee. Its main problem was that mostly people from four-year colleges defined the work in the committee. They were the majority, while those from universities – who actually knew what *university* means – were the minority. On the other hand, while when constructing a house, it is desirable to lay the foundation first, then the first floor on top of it, then the second floor on top of the first, and so on, the same is not true for education. Because for the latter one we first need to agree on the expected „output” and *then* we have to break things down backwards. Unfortunately, we don't operate the Hungarian system of education this way, and the same faulty scheme was used in the Bologna system; they created the input, the BA (*three-year basic program – editor*) and the university spheres decided to jam all the previous material into it.

*It's a typical example of grasp all lose all.*

Precisely. Clearly, after this they couldn't do much with the MA (*two-year masters program – editor*), so now they don't teach history or literature, but renaissance literature; but what's the point of an MA in renaissance literature? So, what are we going to teach in the doctorate program? The reason why we were able to benefit from this in the ancient philology and orientalist specialties was that we introduced a number of classes that were not taught previously, so we were able to provide a much better training. However, this



was inconceivable for the history specialty because the Bologna system simply wasn't a fit for it.

*In fact, a few years ago teachers' training has been restored to be among the five-year training courses again.*

Yes, but imagine that there is a history training that is conducted in a divided training system and there's another one in the five-year teachers' training program that is undivided. It is madness. It's not a coincidence that the lawyers and the doctors didn't undertake the Bologna system. Simply put, politicians, who are no experts in the university sphere, forced a very unfortunate model upon the European universities, which ended up being a lot worse than the one we had abandoned and it has led to chaos. Not to mention that Hungary carried out this transformation in a poor man's style, because in England, where this model is followed, there is a three-year BA course for all language courses, but in the fourth year they go abroad where the given language is spoken. And at the time, when I asked if we were going to follow this model they said we didn't have the money for it. So, we lost the fourth year, the practical part, when the students really could have learned the language. Sure, we can get very far learning the language here at home, but when you actually get out there to a foreign country it becomes clear that most of what you've learned is invalid. Besides, a significant drop in quality has taken place in the entire Hungarian higher education. These days talented young people go to IT courses and humanities have lost a lot of their popularity, the number of applicants are decreasing. IT is the promise of the future at the moment, but hopefully, in time, life will get back to normal.

*While advanced information technology gives a lot to the world, on the other hand, many things get lost.*

It is indisputable that we lose a lot of our abilities due to the advancements of technology. When I had a secretary for the first time in my life, I quickly came to realize that I was able to call anybody before, but once I hired her, I no longer was. The other problem with universities, and the faculties of humanities within them, is that they admit way too many people. We discussed it during a meeting at the Academy that a long time ago about 5-10% of high school graduates were admitted to university and they really wanted to learn and were able to produce results. Today, 40-50% are admitted, but it's still just that 5-10% that actually learns. The rest of them just want to exercise their student rights, their rights to *not* study and this causes the standard to drop. For lack of a better example, it is not evident for many people with a university degree today that "their" does not equal to "there."

*Professor, sticking to the topic of universities, what is your opinion about the debate that has been going on concerning CEU?*

I've never taught there, but based on what I've heard it's my impression that while the government doesn't deal with most of the problems concerning CEU, there are certain things they can't ignore.

*Has CEU been enjoying a privileged situation compared to other Hungarian universities?*

That's correct. 29 universities of foreign background used to operate in Hungary, out of these six were shut down. These didn't belong to just any countries; French and English universities were included among them. However, nobody talks about that, neither here at home, nor abroad. But they didn't say a word, because they were allowed to be shut down according to the Hungarian laws, and really serious quality concerns have arisen with regard to them. A higher education institution may be called a university if at least two of the three areas of science (*humanities, animate natural science, inanimate natural science - editor*) are taught and if it offers BA, MA, and PhD programs.

*There are only MA and PhD programs at CEU, aren't there?*

That's one of the things, there is no BA program, and their MA program is partial, mostly they are only two semesters long and that does not agree with the Hungarian laws. The other thing is that they don't teach two areas of science. So, the government has been exceedingly lenient and understanding with CEU. The other problem, which they did make an issue of, is the fact that CEU issues two university diplomas, one in Hungarian and another in English, though the English language university doesn't exist. But a non-existent institution cannot issue a diploma. And CEU's response to this that „it is part of our business policy” is simply not an answer for the issue raised. This is absolutely not a question of academic freedom, nobody interfered with that.

*This is a legal question.*

Yes, it is simply a legal question, but if you read the news it seems as if the government has made a law against CEU, the Lex CEU. But that's not right. They created a piece of legislation six years ago concerning the Hungarian higher education system, so everyone had exactly six years to re-adjust their affairs. Those institutions that didn't comply were shut down. It was only CEU that they negotiated with regarding one of the issues and the rest of the problems were ignored. By the way, we know a student who came from a country in Central Asia and for him and his family the money he receives there is a matter of life and death. He told us that some CEU students, since they were staying here, wanted to learn Hungarian but they were not allowed. So, that is how Hungarian CEU is. Furthermore, they were told that if they went to ELTE to consult they might as well start packing their bags.

*I'm sure it was done in the name of tolerance. With regard to CEU, but due to other reasons as well, street demonstrations have been happening quite frequently lately. The central element of these has been showing support for the notion of open society. Is it possible to integrate vast muslim communities into European societies?*

Opposed to liberals, I don't believe that integration is an automatic process that can be accomplished by the school system. For example, the integration of gypsies hasn't been successful even though it's been going on for centuries. They live in a completely different social structure and by that I don't mean to say that they don't have any individual accomplishments, but on a larger scale the entire group cannot be fit into the majority of our society. The most that can be done, as it happened at a few places, is that we plant bushes in front of them so their prehistoric circumstances are not visible to the naked eye



from the side of the road. Their work ethics, their social and hierarchical structures are just different.

*Although it's the same religion.*

Well, only if they take it seriously and it isn't just left to survive on the level of superstition. But let me tell you a more interesting example. In the middle of the '60s, during my university years, I met a piarist priest who, being a historian born in a village in Transdanubia, was very intrigued by the fact that the young men of his village immediately started a physical fight with men of the neighboring village every time they would encounter each other. Why was that so?

*Have they inherited it?*

They have, essentially, because he found out that their village was a Cumanian village settled in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Nobody has known for a long time, even they didn't know, that they were descendants of Cumans, but the tradition lived on. So, traditions are shockingly persistent. Even if they become Christians, if they integrate, if they work assiduously, the *alien smell* remains. That's why extreme caution needs to be exercised regarding the mass movement of the various people, even if it is spontaneous. Settling them in is an artificial interference with the fabric of society that can have very severe consequences. Let's think about the Germans who weren't able to integrate into any other neighboring country, except Hungary. If we can believe John Lukacs it happened because the Hungarian culture was so interesting that it was worth assimilating to, even for a German. So, the Swabians assimilated. The Romanians didn't, however, due to the religious differences and we can see how that ended. That's why it is very important to be careful when settling people in, because it isn't as simple as sending them to school and then expecting everything to be resolved there. The same situation is present with regard to Islam, where besides tradition, religious differences give additional color to the story. The starting point for them is that their religion is of divine origin, as it is true for all three major religions (*Judaism, Christianity, Islam* – editor) but it is the muslims who very strongly believe this even today. For them questions of religion are not something that can be the subject of a deal or a debate. There is no bargaining about this, it will simply never happen that due to European education muslims will become less serious about their faith, it's absolutely impossible. Besides, beyond the religious teachings there is a kind of tribal background. It is awfully difficult to comprehend this from where we are, here in Europe, but let me tell you a story to illustrate just how much the tribal traditions saturate the Arab world. While I was completing my studies in Baghdad one of my roommates disappeared for two days. When he finally came home he was very happy and we asked him what had happened. He told us that he had attended a wedding. But why the great happiness if it wasn't his wedding? Well, it turned out that it was one of his friends' wedding who had really started to like a girl when he was at university. However, he had no chance of marrying her because in a society where 90% of the population is illiterate one must pay a huge sum of money for a bride who is university-educated. The boy, who just started his university studies, had no chance at all to save that kind of money in a few decades, before the bride becomes an old lady. Now, we will start a partially new story, but we will come back to this.

So, in Baghdad, the capital, a girl from one tribe was married to a boy from a different tribe. The people assigned for the task of arranging everything did their jobs and the wedding was held in the middle of large-scale fireworks and clamor. After the ceremony, the young couple impatiently retreated, however, shortly after the young man returned furiously, claiming that he had been lied to, betrayed and robbed because there was a problem with the bride. Some older men pulled him aside and asked him whether he knew where he needed to look for *it*. He replied that he did because he had visited women of bad reputation before, so certainly, he knew and that was exactly why he stated what he had stated. Well, people of the tribe jumped up from both sides. The girl's tribe suffered a terrible insult and the boy was insulted as well thinking that they wanted to sell him faulty goods. Finally, they agreed to clarify the facts.

*So, the boy wasn't even allowed to see her before?*

He could see her, but he couldn't speak to her, no interaction could be established between the two of them. We couldn't speak to girls at the university, either, it was a complete apartheid. Then, they set up a committee, took the bride to a gynecologist where she received an official, stamped document that everything was perfectly fine with her. The committee members representing the boy's tribe replied that they knew the doctors were easy to influence, the official stamp and the statement didn't matter, they were going to go to Karbala, to the Abbas mosque and the boy had to swear an oath that he had been telling the truth. News had it that if someone perjured themselves in the Abbas mosque, they would develop a humpback, or at least become crippled or even die. So, they would suffer some kind of misfortune. Well, the boy had to go to the mosque accompanied by the committee but he didn't dare swear an oath. So, the conclusion was drawn that the girl's tribe suffered an unfounded insult. The committee then sat down together to discuss how this horrible insult could be amended and indeed, they reached an agreement. They decided that the boy's tribe was obligated to hand over three girls to the girl's tribe for free, willfully forfeiting their right to ask for money for the brides. Next, the three girls had to appear in front of the other tribe, the chief of the tribe called all the eligible bachelors and pointed at each girl to appoint which one of them would have to marry which young man. This is how my roommate got himself the university student girl who he was infatuated with. And all this happened in Baghdad in the '60s.

*Things were somewhat similar in the Medieval Europe.*

That's right, but meanwhile they discovered love here, and from then on marriages were no longer viewed as business transactions. There, however, it is not even the parents who make the decisions, but the tribe, so the role of the tribe is tremendous. In Europe, political life revolves around rationale, profit and justice. For them justice is important, but religion, ancestry and the relatives are just as relevant. Let's just look at Saddam Hussein – whom did he surround himself with? His relatives. But it is not nepotism. Over there, it is the norm. On the other hand, the family is going through changes there as well. According to muslim law, in case somebody dies, the Quran determined the inheritance of collateral relatives, however in the past century these practices were overwritten by the inheritance of lineal descendants that, however, it's not outlined in the ancient muslim laws. It means that the concept of ex-



tended family is beginning to change. Sure, a family still consists of hundreds of people but lineal descendants are preferred over collateral ones in the matter of inheritance.

What do we have to know about the five laws?

There are five types of serious sins. The center of Islam is the law, not the knowledge of God. So, it is not about how we may imagine God, as it is in Christian theology.

*It doesn't even come up as an option that Allah doesn't exist, does it?*

Absolutely not. *Aslama* means "at peace" with the will of God. And that's why saying that Islam is a religion of peace is fraud, it isn't true, it is not what it's about. It's about being at peace with the will of God. This partially answers the question of population explosion as well. They think it's God's will. In the Arab world, they often have a sign in the taxis that reads, "I've relied on Allah." And that's exactly how they drive. They just floor the pedals; turn the steering wheel and Allah watches over them. But it doesn't always work out. In the Arab world people live in their own environment and the qadi, the judge, who knows the law provides directions to them in their day-to-day existence in all aspects of life. And the state was led by whoever was able to seize the power by military means. If that person was a foreigner, then it was a foreigner. We know of Muhammad Ali, founder of modern Egypt, that he never learned Arabic in his entire life, although he was Albanian, he spoke Turkish. So, he consulted with his subjects with the help of a Turkish interpreter. So, the life of the state evolved as it did, but it didn't really impact people and their daily lives. Islam doesn't provide instructions regarding how the head of state ought to be chosen or the rights they might have. Basically, people didn't have to worry about the laws of the state; only the religious laws concerned them, which seemed to have been just enough to get on with their own, narrowly tailored lives. The formulation of state laws is the accomplishment of merely the past one and a half century; their nation states also came about only following World War I.

*And how they came about...*

With the help of a ruler, yes. And they certainly didn't have any experience in public administration, they didn't know how to govern a state; it's not a coincidence that Arab countries tend to have more failures. Before, they were at the disposal of the Turkish sultan and his office holders then all of a sudden, they were given a state to govern.

*To top it off, in the Sykes-Picot agreement (1916 – editor) they managed to draw the borders, as they did in case of Trianon, by completely disregarding the ethnic aspects.*

They disregarded everything. A book called 'Line in the Sand' (Daniel Miller, 2011) was published a few years ago in which it was unveiled that Sir Mark Sykes, this English gentleman, visited the Middle East only twice, meanwhile declaring himself to be an expert of the region and claiming to speak the local languages. Of course, he didn't speak any of the languages. And this completely ignorant, amateur person determined how the peace talk was to be orchestrated. They fragmented family relations, cut Sunnite tribes from the Euphrates in half, one part remained in Iraq, and the other ended up becoming part of Syria. Of course, they continued to go back and forth across the borders, they weren't

really moved by some French and English gentlemen and who said that *from now on there was a border here*. They were going back and forth for thousands of years! Regrettably, however, they come to our borders with the same mentality.

*It is allowed to do so if nobody shoots at them. But let's revisit the concept of the five most important religious laws.*

Their acts are grouped into five categories, the highest one contains the mandatory ones, such as the five daily prayers, disregarding this is a sin. However, there are five acts that are sinful to commit. These include brigandage, theft, murder, adultery and accusing someone of the latter one. The three categories in between contain indifferent acts meaning that the religion doesn't prohibit them. Some are recommended, others are not prohibited but not recommended either, for example, lying is one of these. But if a muslim gains advantage through lying he or she is permitted to do so.

*What do they think about democracy, a concept not built upon divine laws?*

Man cannot create laws, only God can. Everyone can draw their own conclusions based on this. Actually, my colleagues translated for many of the arriving people and while they truthfully told the interpreter prior to or after the interrogation that they didn't have a cousin in Sweden, they stated otherwise to the officials. So, if it is beneficial for them, they are allowed to claim that they are Syrians, it is not a sin. I have to add that in many instances the things we view as lies are simply polite gestures for them. For example, if I invite them for lunch, they will accept the invitation even if they don't want to dine with me, however, they won't show up for the appointment. They didn't feel like going, but it would have been rude to say no. For them, it is not a lie, it is a courtesy.

*Based on this, living as a minority in a European, or any other non-muslim society might feel like a schizophrenic state of mind.*

Precisely. It is a schizophrenic state, but I have to add that most muslims who live in European societies have absolutely no idea about the ordainments of their religion. Their knowledge is more on the level of superstition, which they insist on following. The problem is that Islam does not have a central education office, so people formulate a picture of the teachings of their religion based on their own intellectual capacities.

*Does this refer to Sunnites?*

The Sunnites, yes. We can conclude from this that they may swear to me that their religion teaches this and this, it doesn't necessarily mean that they are correct, but they live by that, regardless. And if the other Sunnite doesn't live the same way, then he or she is the enemy. So, they foster this hostile relationship among each other as well, it's enough to look at Saudi Arabia and Qatar.

*Based on this, is it practically impossible to say who's who during a European inspection?*

Exactly. It is one part of the problem; the other is that they bring these hostilities with themselves, whether they're ethnic or religious disagreements. That's why I don't think that the European authorities should care about where someone comes from and they



shouldn't adjust the procedures to it. These laws are entirely invalid in Europe. If Europe put its foot down and truly behaved as a secular entity, then these religious laws would have no place here whatsoever. If the state of Hungary disregards the canon law of the Catholic Church then why would it consider Sharia law, which is equivalent to it in its role? Either they accept that there is no Sharia here, or they should be deported, because all of this is unacceptable. If they escaped the Middle East, they should not bring their hostilities here, because if they do, we will end up having to escape from here.

*A survey was made not too long ago about the integration of muslims in Brussels. The results are not quite promising to say the least. Is it possible that reality is even more crushing?*

There is one thing that people who make these surveys don't know: if they address the muslims in Arabic then they will consider them to be family and tell them what they truly think, even if they know that they are speaking to a European. But if they talk to them in English or French they will give answers that they think the asking party wants to hear. Even if they consider themselves to be integrated, they will still want to live according to Sharia. Not to mention that according to an agreement sustained in Muhammad's biography a muslim will not enter an alliance with a non-muslim against another muslim. In other words, if a muslim carries out a terrorist attack in Europe, the other muslim will never cooperate with the non-muslim police force, even if they, themselves don't approve of the attack.

*Then the question that should be asked is that in case things escalate in any of the European countries, who will stand where?*

Obviously the muslims will create a unified block. Aristotle collected the constitution of 110 city states, studied them and wrote down that in any state where outsiders settled down in larger numbers, sooner or later, things had to be decided between two parties: the natives and the newcomers. If it happened early enough then they persecuted the minority that was settling in, if it happened too late, the natives were persecuted.

*We have a great Hungarian idiom to illustrate this situation, too bad that it's unprintable. However, we can quote the Hungarian Prime Minister who said around 2015 that Europe is rich and weak, which is quite a dangerous combination. Would it be a solution if the incoming people had something to conform to?*

Indeed, Europe is weak in all sorts of moral aspects, as well. For example, even the Islamic laws prohibit what happened in Cologne. I have never heard the words „duty” or „responsibility” uttered from the lips of these so-called human rights activists who insist on supporting the perpetrators quoting their human rights. To give an example, they've already gone as far as allowing marriage between a human being and an animal, an object or even themselves. But they never speak about the responsibilities. It was painful to see when that Syrian child drowned in the sea, it is unfortunate, but why am I being held responsible instead of the father?

*When it was he who put the child in the boat without a life jacket at the Turkish shores where there was no war going on at that moment.*

That's exactly it. So why do I have to have a bad conscience? Something has fundamentally become distorted here. Currently, there are people in Europe who possess certain rights and duties, they have responsibilities; and there are others who only have rights, but no duties, no responsibilities whatsoever. What should they conform to, nihilism? Tolerance is not some kind of entity that one can conform to, it especially isn't if we continuously tailor it however we see it fit for each occasion; as in we are tolerant of certain things, while other things we can't even talk about because it is immediately labeled as hate speech. It should be self-evident that if someone with an immigrant background commits any crime in Europe he or she should be sent back home right away, instead of arguing about whether a victim is able to recognize the attacker or not. If multiple men harass a woman, she obviously won't memorize their faces one by one, that is an insane expectation.

*Sticking to the topic of Western Europe, I can't believe that there aren't excellent scientists, researchers, professionals who would be able to pinpoint exactly what is happening and where all this leads. Why is it that politics seem to ignore the opinion of competent people?*

The opinion of professionals is only necessary if it validates the predetermined intent of politicians. If their views are not what they are expected to be, they are not needed. Scientists have to let go of the illusion that anybody is interested in what they have to say, unless it's a validation that can be used after the fact. I'm not familiar with the operation of the propaganda machine but it was purely insane to blame all the problems of Germany on Hungary for letting the migrants pass through the country.

*Well, such is politics, simplifying everything.*

That's fine, but it is not simplification, this is a blatant lie.

*Indeed, it was. However, what politics don't talk about is the fact that while over 1 million uneducated people flooded Germany, another 1 million educated Germans left the country. Is it good business for politics?*

It certainly isn't, and while it is understandable that half the world departs from their homes due to overpopulation and desertification, it is utterly incomprehensible why we let them in, instead of helping them locally, and why we are allowing the disintegration of the European legal order. It is unlikely that we ever get answers to these questions, not in the near future, anyway. There are certain signs that can be used to draw conclusions, such as Soros' presence in Brussels where he definitely appears as a supporter of migration, but all this isn't enough for us to speak about solid knowledge.

*This is a huge business for many.*

It is for ISIS who got their hands on huge sums of money out of human trafficking, and it is for German real estate owners as well whose properties are leased to the state. But migration is also profitable for legal services, interpreters, and pharmaceutical companies. There were certain illusions regarding the labor force, precisely due to the 1 million German emigrants who were planned to be replaced by Syrian doctors and engineers.

*But it didn't work out.*



No, it didn't. Especially not on the long run because the work ethics of the immigrants is very different. Not too long ago, I watched a sermon of a sheikh from Qatar in which he explained that in the Arab world, particularly in the richer countries, they have everything, even the latest Mercedes, but they haven't manufactured a single screw of that car. Why? Because they do not take work seriously. He added and subtracted until he reached the conclusion that an Arab official works a maximum of 10 minutes in a day.

*We have already touched upon the demographic situation of the third world. In China, for example, there was a desire that rose from within to settle the question, why doesn't this even come up in muslim countries? Or, if the modern West has already been interfering with these countries with medicine and infrastructure, why wouldn't they try to get this across?*

Allah has given, Allah will maintain it, and this is the approach.

*Is it an entirely cast-iron principle?*

It isn't necessarily cast-iron because it could be overruled by empiricism, but if we welcome the surplus, it won't be. The population has increased drastically because starting with the introduction of healthcare services and going further on, white man has eliminated all sorts of natural control. It is not the result of some coincidence that in certain Sub-Saharan countries the population has increased tenfold in the past 50 years despite the ongoing desertification. In the Arab world, the increase was ninefold in the past 100 years, Iran can be considered here as well, but in Europe this did not happen, that's the reason for the vacuum effect.

*Don't the leaderships of various nations see this as a problem?*

No, they don't. Most of Lebanon's population, for example, already lives abroad, so only a minority of Lebanese people actually lives in Lebanon. If there is just one country in the Arab world, the population of which lives mostly in foreign countries, it will serve as an example for the rest of the nations.

*According to the religious modifications of Islam that took place at the beginning of the '90s, what do muslims have to do if they live in a country as a minority?*

They must preserve and spread their religion. The criterion of a state in case of Islam is that whoever proclaims the prayer is the leader of the political community. If we look at our history books, the English conquered Egypt around 1860, the French conquered Algeria in 1830, but according to the Eastern maps these same countries are shown to belong to the Ottoman Empire all the way until the end of World War I. Why? Because the Friday prayer was declared in the name of the Turkish sultan and the *Zakat* (religious obligation or tax in Islam – editor) was collected on his command. Now, who decides the following question in Europe: in whose name the prayer is proclaimed in Molenbeek? For sure, it is not in the name of the Belgian king.

*So, the cartoons describing German bathing customs don't help?*

I don't think they do. Once they become a majority somewhere and start living according to Sharia, it is their territory. That is why the presence of Sharia patrol all over Western

Europe is perfectly understandable. Because those areas now belong to the territory of their political community, the host country doesn't have much to do with it anymore. The fact that theirs is canon law, and the other is state law is indifferent to them. And if there is multiculturalism in Europe then what is the problem with living according to different systems of law? Then why can't there be *multilaws*?

*Where does this lead?*

They don't run into any boundaries at the moment, there aren't any things that are prohibited for them so they're becoming more and more presumptuous and demanding. Germans say that they thought that the language courses were going to be the first step of integration, but as soon as they learn a few words they use them to start demanding things. Because they're realizing that they just have to make demands and everybody immediately runs to meet them, otherwise they're called a fascist or a racist. So, Europe lets them loose, no boundaries, no responsibilities, and no duties. Only human rights. And if a woman can marry a train station, because this is her identity and her purpose, and she even finds an able priest, then how can a migrant possibly wish for anything that can't be fulfilled?

*Is there a fundamental problem within?*

Precisely. I've spoken about this on multiple occasions, that those European values that we hear oh, so much about are nothing but moral and ideological nihilism, egoism, and hedonism.

*I think we've carefully examined reality. Professor, you speak many languages, you read and write in even more, it's fair to say that you've traveled around the world. Have you had an experience that follows you to this day?*

I studied at Baghdad State University for a year, and I managed to go to Vienna thanks to the support of my boss at the time, János Harmatta. Later I worked as a foreign colleague in Berlin, at the Scientific Academy of the German Democratic Republic; and I also stayed in Leningrad for a year due to receiving the Keldish scholarship from the Academy of Science of the Soviet Union and I worked as a regular member of the Leningrad Section of the Orientalist Institute. I also worked as a visiting researcher at Harvard. By favor of my wife I spent half a year in Cambridge, she thought it would be better if we both went. That's when the idea of creating the Avicenna Institute came about. People tend to look back on certain things with warm feelings only after a certain time; things which at the time didn't feel like memorable experiences. Taking a glance into a different world, a different culture seems to be an irreplaceable enrichment in hindsight. I would be filled with regret if all this had been left out. It was surprising to be welcomed by such a strong Christian community in Baghdad. I observed Sundays according to European customs, although we should have gone to university I told them that on Sundays I go to church and they accepted it.

*They had respected another religion more than they would have respected the lack of religion altogether, right?*

Precisely put, they appreciated me for it. Many young men, like me, attended church and after the mass they went to the Christian club and I joined them. So, I became part of a



Christian community, which gave me a sense of home, I made a lot of friends at the time. And it was really touching to see how much the Christian communities love each other around there. The spirit of ancient Christianity lingered around them. In Egypt, I saw the priest and the members of the congregation go on trips, visiting old Egyptian sites, traces of their ancestors. Eastern Christians live a completely different religious life, but the Roman Church labeled them heretics and chose to ignore them and obviously, the orthodox church takes advantage of it. Moscow's influence is represented via the Eastern Christians because they are the only ones who protect their interests. A lot of things can be understood and derived from this that political scientists don't always understand; therefore, they get a false sense of the picture. I've actually had some depressing dreams in Baghdad about the prospect of having to come home without visiting Babylon. So, one morning I woke up and asked my roommates where I could catch a bus to Babylon and I went. Once I got there, I immediately realized that the place to find Babylon is the Pergamon Museum, there are only bare brick walls at the actual site. But the fact that I stood on the grounds of Babylon, there at the bank of the Euphrates, well, these things will only reach the level of apperception later.

*The Syrian government troops recently recaptured Mosul. What do you think is going to happen to the fighters who have become unemployed?*

Matter doesn't disappear, it just changes form. Al-Qaeda has become the Islamic State and ISIS will also turn into something else. I am sure that we are in a lot less danger terrorism-wise than Western Europe is. They have good reasons to be afraid, as do the various Arab countries. They have defeated the Islamic State, which means that they ended one form of terrorism.

*What is going to happening to you during this hot summer, before the hot autumn?*

We are working hard on something that primarily requires patience and diligence, and as we know men are less likely to possess these noble attributes than women. We found the library catalog of Bayezid II (*Sultan of the Ottoman Empire between 1447 and 1512 – editor*) in the Library of the Academy, let me just add that his library was three times as big as Matthias I's Corvina Library<sup>17</sup>. So, we are publishing this catalog, which is interesting because it sheds clear light on the culture of the Ottoman Empire. We are planning a facsimile edition (*clone edition – editor*) that will have a cover page with Latin letters and Arabic letters as well. We are also preparing a monographic volume, or volumes, not sure yet how long it will be. The books lay in a Turkish library and something was written on the spine of the books, but it was only approximate information. It was either the author's name, or the title of the book, but it may have been marked by other things. So, we have to compile our work using these incomplete bits of descriptions, and the only person who could really interpret these descriptions was the librarian himself.

*It's an exciting research project, how many people are working on it?*

Six Arabists, two iranianists and two turkologists are involved. We try to work with the best of our abilities, but the possibility of error is huge in these types of works. So, this

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<sup>17</sup> Matthias I (1443-1490) was a king of Hungary his famous library was called Corvina.

is the plan for the summer, we would need to complete it by the end of the year. But as I have mentioned above, it is terribly painful for a man to do such work, we are unable to animate ourselves unlike our female colleagues who enjoy digging into the details with great enthusiasm. Meanwhile, I feel guilty because the colleagues should be writing their dissertations and doing other research. But we also know that a Turkish group at Harvard University is working on this, too, so it is a race.

*Is that inspiring enough?*

Oh, absolutely!